

TAHSEEN Project/Catalyst Consortium



Two Days in Minia: Mobilizing the Community, Showcasing Integration, and Insuring Sustainability

19-20 January 2004



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Two Days in Minia

We have worked very closely with the Governor of Minia and our success is largely due to his direct involvement and support. At his request, in order to mobilize the community, encourage our partners to redouble their efforts, instill a sense of ownership and insure sustainability, we worked with our partners to organize several meetings, community events and clinic openings to showcase the integrated model of development we are implementing in Minia.



Over the course of two days – 19 and 20 January – we held a meeting with representatives of the Minia community, observed a short segment of a four-day training workshop for the Youth Committee, visited several newly renovated clinics, watched productions of the puppet show and the play we had helped to produce, sat in on a seminar organized by a local NGO on contraceptive use, observed a

training session on Evidence Based Medicine, visited a pharmacy that is part of the Ask/Consult Network and on the last day, joined the Governor in visiting a clinic and participating in a large community meeting.

Visiting Minia in person is the only way to truly understand the energy, excitement and enthusiasm of the people of Minia. In many ways, the two days we spent in Minia was more than just a celebration of TAHSEEN. It was a celebration of Minia and the commitment to change exhibited by everyone from the Governor and the Secretary General to ministry officials, NGO's, religious leaders, youth, women's groups, medical school professors, pharmacists, outreach workers, community leaders and the men, women and children of the villages we visited.

This document will be a poor substitute for participating in the visit, but we hope it will give the reader a sense of what we saw, what we heard and what we learned during our two days in Minia.

19 January 2004

9:30am Minia Community Meeting

Monday morning started with a community meeting at the Young Muslim Men's Association of Minia. Approximately forty people including local religious leaders, representatives of NGOs, local television, radio and print journalists (members of the Minia Media Group), Information Education and Communications (IEC) leaders, Minia University representatives and State Information Service (SIS) officials attended the meeting.

In general, everyone was impressed with the way that TAHSEEN had worked with the entire community and expressed the hope that TAHSEEN would be able to expand their work to other districts.



According to a radio announcer who was a member of the Minia Media Group, "Before [TAHSEEN's training] the messages that were going out were vague and not very clear. After the training, we were more capable of producing programs." Her suggestion was that TAHSEEN should train more people, particularly in other age groups in order to reach out to young people.

An NGO representative said, "When TAHSEEN went into the field, they did something no one ever tried; they reached out to every level and every group." In particular, he cited TAHSEEN's work with local religious leaders.

One of the Muslim religious leaders in attendance thanked TAHSEEN for their work and said that now they had "accurate reproductive health and family planning information" and that now they can "point people in the right direction." The Christian religious leader added, "Reproductive health is a wonderful concept that is applicable to all ages, particularly the newly married."

Stressing the importance of integration, the representative of St. Marc, one of the NGO groups that TAHSEEN will work with to train other NGOs, said that TAHSEEN's approach, and ability to establish links throughout the community, "made everyone talk

the same language.” Emphasizing her appreciation she added, “We are lucky to have TAHSEEN in Minia.”

According to her, the renovation of the clinics was particularly successful in sending a message to people who had historically been difficult to reach. These people, who in the past had resisted outreach efforts, were so eager for the clinics to open and seemed more receptive to hearing family planning and reproductive health messages.

Brenda Doe, USAID’s Family Planning and Reproductive Health Team Leader, joined us for the visit to see TAHSEEN’S work first hand. In her comments to the group, she praised TAHSEEN for going to the community and actively seeking their input and advice. She said, “TAHSEEN came to you, asked you what you wanted and worked with you. They did not have a pre-packaged program.” She added that it was a good sign that the community wanted more of TAHSEEN but cautioned that eventually the community would have to take responsibility for sustaining the work that had been started.

One person suggested starting an NGO named TAHSEEN, while a professor from Minia Medical School cited the Evidence Based Medicine unit as one project that was self-sustaining. Another participant suggested starting a training center that could continue the training that TAHSEEN has been doing, in an effort to train the trainers.

One of TAHSEEN’s partners added that it was a question of ownership over the project, explaining that eventually “it will be our project, not USAID’s.” He added that TAHSEEN changed the ‘mindset’ and the culture in Minia from the governor on down. He added that this new mindset would help sustain the work that TAHSEEN had begun.

Emphasizing TAHSEEN’s approach, Mohamed Abu Nar, Deputy Country Representative added, “We didn’t impose anything on Minia. We worked jointly with the community to identify what they wanted us to do.”

Dr. Damianos Odeh, Country Representative, closed the meeting by thanking the community for giving TAHSEEN “the chance” to help. He called it an honor and a privilege to help and reiterated a pledge he made on his first trip to Minia. “When we came here we made one promise: that we would serve with devotion. Once again, I promise you our full devotion.”

10:45am Youth Committee Training Workshop

Our next stop was the Youth Committee's four-day training workshop. It was the last day of their training and we joined them for about forty-five minutes to listen in on what they were discussing.



Over the course of the four days, the committee, which included government officials, university professors, representatives of various ministries, journalists, religious leaders, NGOs leaders and youth, established a common framework for discussing FP/RH issues, and identified

strategies for networking, problem solving and exchanging ideas and experiences.

According to one of the participants, they learned about puberty and adolescence, the reproductive systems of men and women, common concerns and misconceptions (particularly of women), problems faced by youth and the need for better communication between youth and adults. One pressing concern is that parents are not presenting information to their children about reproductive health.

In the absence of such communication, young people are unfortunately turning to sources that are supplying inaccurate and sometimes misleading information. Much of the workshop focused on determining what information was needed and what services would be most helpful.

The Youth Committee is charged with spreading information throughout the community. Two members in particular, a television announcer and an NGO representative, underlined the importance of the training referring to misconceptions they had before the workshop. According to the journalist, "Before the workshop, I had some misconceptions about reproductive health." As someone who frequently talks with youth during the course of his job, he felt he needed to have the "right information" before talking to people. Another member of the committee added, "Despite being a married woman, I too had many misconceptions about reproductive health."

12:00pm Tayeba Clinic

The first clinic we visited on our trip was the Tayeba clinic. Although it was mostly



finished (it was painted white with blue trim), we are still waiting for equipment and supplies. Of the five clinics that TAHSEEN chose to renovate, Tayeba had been one of the most uncomfortable ones for women to visit.

Work on the clinic included fully renovating the rooms, fixing the pipes and sewer lines, fixing the bathrooms, adding hot water heaters, strengthening the walls, and

creating a little garden outside the clinic.

What made Tayeba particularly uncomfortable was the lack of privacy; there was very little separation between the street and the clinic. Women visiting the clinic were forced to contend with kids playing outside the windows, people selling vegetables and donkeys being tied up outside the front door.

One of the biggest improvements was a wall that was built around the clinic. At almost twelve feet high, it provides a sense of privacy that was sorely lacking before.

Constructing the wall, however, was no easy task. According to people who worked at the clinic, “The lack of a wall has been a problem for more than fifteen years. No one has ever solved it before.”

When TAHSEEN raised the issue during one its regular meetings with the Governor, the Secretary General personally intervened to insure that TAHSEEN’S contractor would have the necessary permissions to build the wall.

According to the physician who works at the clinic, they are going to collect utilization data and compare it to data collected before the clinic was renovated. The attention to detail at the Tayeba clinic was astounding; the contractors painted the doors with the stylized man and woman found in the TAHSEEN logo.

1:00pm The Puppet Show: Aragos and Kishk

Just outside the clinic a tent was set up for a showing of the puppet show designed by TAHSEEN: The Engagement of Aragos and Kishk.



A few minutes after we joined the almost five hundred people already assembled in the tent, we realized what all the excitement was about. A high-pitched, squeaky cartoon laugh punctuated the air. Everyone turned his or her attention to the little booth that had been set up in the front of the tent. Up popped Aragos, dancing to music that was familiar to everyone in the audience.

The puppet show, which presents information about issues like early

marriage, pre-marital counseling, the importance of child spacing, the need to delay the first pregnancy and parent-adolescent communication, was very engaging. You could see it on people's faces and hear it in their laughter.

The puppet show itself is only twenty minutes, but it is followed by a question and answer period with a physician, a sociologist and sometimes a religious leader. Aragos served as the emcee, posing questions to the panelists. The panelists, in turn, engaged in a dialogue with both the audience and Aragos. It is this interactive format that maintains the audience's attention and makes it easier to deliver important messages about family planning and reproductive health.

The energy level of audience was contagious. Little kids kept running up to sit at the front and watch the puppet show. Others were peeking through the festive cloth trying to get a quick look at what was going on. More importantly, people were laughing and having a good time while receiving important and relevant information.

4:30pm The Sawada Clinic / NGO Seminar

The welcome at the second clinic was even better than the first one. Colorful flags lined the walkway to the entrance of the clinic. Young children sang songs celebrating the clinic and put on a skit in which they portrayed germs and bacteria being beaten back by



medicine. It was the perfect way to start the second half of the day.

This clinic featured a photo display and a video showing what the clinic looked like before the renovations had started.

Upstairs, there was an apartment for the physician and a community room where classes and training can be held in collaboration with a local NGO.

Outside the clinic, St. Marc had organized a seminar featuring education on the use of different contraceptives and a question and answer session with an audience of about three hundred people.

6:00pm EBM Training Session at Minia Medical School

Next on our agenda was a stop at the Minia Medical School where we sat in on the first



half a training session on Evidence Based Medicine. Monday's session, for the ten members of the medical school's OB/GYN faculty being trained in EBM, focused on how to use Internet search engines. Although working with Google or Yahoo! may be routine for people familiar with the Internet, this training also included the use of meta-search engines, medical databases and the appropriate way to structure searches (based on disease, population and outcome desired). The

President of Minia University was so appreciative of this, and other USAID efforts in Minia, that he invited Brenda Doe back to campus the next day to present her with a special award.

9:00pm The Play: The Story of Hanneya

After a reception at the Governor's office, we assembled in a nearby auditorium. The Secretary General presented training certificates for physicians and members of the Youth Committee, thanking them for their efforts.

Following that short ceremony, we joined four hundred people to watch the story of Hanneya – a play produced by TAHSEEN to convey important messages regarding family planning and reproductive health.



The play opens with a narrator/singer setting the scene. Just as the puppet show got people's attention, the narrator, with live musical accompaniment immediately drew the audience's eyes and ears toward the center of the stage.

The set design was simple, but effective, with a space for scenes that take place indoors and space for a coffee shop as well.

The play is a story about Sayed and his marriage to Hanneya. Sayed is a loafer who marries Hanneya despite the fact that she is only fourteen years old. He is disappointed after having three daughters in a row and leaves to find his fortune in the Gulf.

In his absence Hanneya, whose health suffered from having too many children too quickly, begins literacy classes and gets a micro credit loan to start a small weaving factory.

In the Gulf, Sayed loses his job and is deported back to Egypt. Disillusioned, he returns home to find his wife an educated and successful woman. The play ends with Sayed advising a friend not to marry until the bride is at least eighteen, encouraging him to delay the first pregnancy, be happy whether it is a boy or a girl and support his wife's education.

According to one member of the audience, the actors used "the right language" and had the "right balance." They also did a good job of getting people's attention with particularly entertaining song and dance routines. Another audience member said, "They didn't look like they were acting. It was very authentic."

One way of gauging audience reaction is the applause at the end. Men and women both were applauded enthusiastically, particularly when the actors that played Sayed and Hanneya took their bows. We ended the day on a high note, marveling that such a high

quality performance could be produced in Minia, using local actors and stage crews. One visitor likened it to seeing a Broadway-type play when you are expecting to see community theater.

20 January 2004

9:30am The Governor's Visit

Ask/Consult Network / Clinic Opening Ceremony / Community Event



Monday morning, although cloudy and somewhat cold, was special. Although the agenda was simple – a visit to Nazlet Al Amodein to visit a clinic that was ready to open – there was a certain excitement in the air. The Governor of Minia, who could not join us the day before, would be joining us today.

Our first stop was a pharmacy that is part of the Ask/Consult Network of physicians and pharmacists – private sector providers of health care. One of TAHSEEN's projects is to strengthen and improve the Ask/Consult Network in order to make it more effective.



The Governor, joining Brenda Doe and Dr. Damianos Odeh, walked up to the pharmacy and learned about the work that they are doing. Hundreds of people were on hand to watch.

Then they turned around to walk toward the clinic, stopping at the

front entrance to chat with the community outreach workers. After a ribbon cutting ceremony and an unveiling of a sign dedicating the clinic, the Governor and other dignitaries toured the facilities.

This clinic was ready for business and had all the equipment, supplies, and signage in place. As the physician who works there said, "The renovations were great. It makes the clinic a place that encourages you to work harder."

After a tour of the clinic, the Governor presided over a community meeting. Almost six hundred people filled the tent to hear the Governor and others talk about the work being done in Minia.



The Secretary General, in his comments, reminded the audience that “Minia has become a focus for donor organizations” and that the “entire world” is looking at it as a model for development. Gesturing toward the clinic, he said, “You all know what it was like before. After using it, you will see how much it has improved.” Referring to TAHSEEN’s work establishing linkages between the clinic and

the surrounding community he noted the improved relationships between the clinic and local schools, NGO’s, religious groups and others.

When it was his turn to speak, Dr. Odeh told the audience that the first time TAHSEEN came to Minia, they came as visitors. Now, “we are treated as family.” He reiterated TAHSEEN’s approach to working with people in Minia by noting that “You identified the problems, you gave us the solutions. You told us what you wanted.”

As far as sustainability is concerned, and the question of what will happen after TAHSEEN leaves, an issue raised earlier in the trip, Brenda Doe said, “It is wonderful to know [the work] will continue, that it will grow, and that it will get better.”

The Governor took a populist approach, joking with the audience and reinforcing the importance of having smaller families. He noted how hard it is to support large families and even joked that even the village pharmacist has eight kids.

The Governor, in his comments, talked about the important role that citizens will need to play in order to sustain this effort over the long-run and the health and economic benefits of smaller families. He gave an overview of the different development projects that are taking place in Minia and emphasized that “No matter what we do, we can’t succeed without the help of every individual.”

The crowd responded well to his relaxed speaking style and his easy smile. It was the first time that the Governor had visited this particular village and the crowd embraced him warmly. The Governor’s full support and commitment has been key to TAHSEEN’s success in Minia.

Parting Thoughts

At the end of the day we were tired, but had learned a lot about TAHSEEN's impact on Minia. We are renovating clinics, training physicians, building NGO capacity, finding creative ways to convey family planning and reproductive health messages and encouraging the development of the private sector.

TAHSEEN is using an integrated model that actively seeks the advice and input of all segments of society, from political officials to religious leaders, NGO's, and the women, men and youth of Minia. TAHSEEN has brought new meaning and a level of dedication to locally directed development work that is fully recognized and appreciated in Minia. As one of the NGO representatives said, "Partnership is the best way to get things done." We couldn't agree more. In fact, this is just the beginning.

